Library of Michigan
LSTA Five Year State Plan Evaluation
October 1, 1997-September 30, 2002
Executive Summary
February 27, 2002

Background
LSTA

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) is contained within the Museum and Library Services Act of 1996. The LSTA is a federal grant program administered by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), (http://www.imls.gov), via the state library agencies. In LSTA, the emphasis lies in the development of library services that could take advantage of the emerging technologies.

After its passage, LSTA required each state create a five-year plan that would be used as a blueprint for documenting how the LSTA funds would be spent in that state. The culmination of the State of Michigan response resulted in the *Library Services and Technology Act Five-Year State Plan for Michigan, October 1, 1997-September 30, 2002.* In this document, LSTA goals for Michigan were articulated as follows:

LSTA Goals for Michigan

GOAL I: To develop and fund LSTA programs in support of statewide access to the widest possible range of information for all residents of the state through all types of libraries.
GOAL II: To increase equity of information access by providing special assistance to areas of the state where library services are inadequate (under-served rural and urban communities), and to libraries that are working to provide service to persons having difficulty using a library.

GOAL III: To support the continued development of information skills through continuing education on a collaborative basis statewide.
GOAL IV: To foster innovation and technical improvements in information services by funding leading edge projects in libraries which will serve as models and training centers.

The Library Services and Technology Act requires each State to independently evaluate and report on the activities undertaken prior to the end of the 5 year plan. The purpose of the evaluation is to show what difference LSTA State funding has made in meeting the needs identified in the 5 year plan.

Library of Michigan

The Library of Michigan is the official state library agency for Michigan. The primary mission and purpose of the Library of Michigan is to promote, advocate and consistently work to achieve the highest level of library service to the State of Michigan and its residents.

Situation

The Library of Michigan sought an independent consultant to perform a comprehensive evaluation of its LSTA Five-Year State Plan for Michigan. The results of the evaluation study will also provide diagnostics and recommendations relating to the development of the next 5 year State plan. The WJSchroer Company was hired to conduct the evaluation as a result of a competitive bid award.

Study Methodology and Data Collection Techniques

WJSchroer recommended the use of a combination of qualitative, quantitative and written analytical review of submitted documents and data spreadsheets to provide the information needed for the evaluation and findings. Implemented sequentially, qualitative research serves as a guide and framework for essential elements of information to be independently validated through quantitative research. The independent document review allows comparisons, trends and patterns to be identified and evaluated in relation to the correspondent data.

Qualitative- The evaluator team conducted six focus groups with (2) each in Eastern Michigan; Western Michigan; and, Northern Michigan areas respectively. Sites included Flint, Southfield, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Paw Paw and Escanaba.   These six focus groups included 6-10 participants in each group from all types of libraries within that geographical area.

Quantitative- A quantitative survey using random contact telephone surveys of knowledgable library staff from all eligible libraries around the State completed 253 interviews.

Document Review- The evaluator team also completed a Document Review, selecting five different participating libraries from different parts of the State. Each library has submitted multiple applications (over a period of several years) to the Library of Michigan for LSTA funding.

Upon completion of the three different measurement and evaluation methods, findings were summarized, then compared and patterns identified. All findings were reviewed against the specific objectives of the proposal and significant and relevant findings are included in the overall findings and recommendations of the study.

Data Analysis

Preface

The reader is invited to read the Management Summary and Recommendations from each of the independent studies: Focus Group Study, Telephone Survey, Document Analysis Survey. Elements of those summaries and recommendations are contained in the Final Report Summary and Recommendations outlined below.

Data Analysis/Findings/Discussion
Executive Summary
Awareness/Participation
An initial finding is an appreciation the awareness of the LSTA program and/or experience with the LSTA program is very good, but not complete. About 2/3 of public libraries in the State appear to have someone knowledgable on staff regarding LSTA. Among special, school and academic libraries the ratio is much lower. This limitation may impact on the LSTA participation (non-applicants) as libraries without an awareness of the program or without staff experience with LSTA are less likely to compete for and win a LSTA grant.

Respondents were generally aware of two LSTA primary goals. Goals most often cited include: "stimulate innovation of technology"/"increase access in underserved areas".

LSTA Goal Accomplishment
Accomplishment of four LSTA goals is somewhat mixed. The survey data suggests LSTA is achieving...
<   ...generally good effectiveness on **statewide access** as a result of the "targeted programs" or AccessMichigan, along with some grants provided several years ago which were almost non-competitive which provided technology access to especially those libraries that had almost no technology at the time.
<   ...**equity of access** was seen as being effectively achieved largely through non-competitive grants and targeted programs
<   ...**developing information skills** seen as somewhat less effectively achieved
<   ...**innovation** achieved through competitive grants in some doubt. Most funding approved for good ideas already in circulation somewhere else

Overall, respondents awarded highest marks to the "equity of access" and "statewide access". "Information skills development" was universally rated lowest.
Respondents awarded the Library of Michigan an average score of 5.63 out of 7 possible points regarding how effective the Library is in accomplishing LSTA goals.

Evaluator's Grade:
Statewide Access= A- Equity of Access=B Develop Information Skills=C- Stimulate Innovation and Technical Improvements=B Overall=B+

Satisfaction with LSTA program and Library of Michigan

The data suggests library staff are generally aware of the LSTA program and are supportive of the program. Most are complimentary regarding the Library of Michigan's administrative management of the program. Respondents credit the LSTA program and Library of Michigan with AccessMichigan, a program widely endorsed within the library community. Respondents also tend to credit the LSTA program with raising the level of technology in libraries throughout the State. Respondents in both focus groups and telephone surveys believe technology programs funded by LSTA are widely in place and with few exceptions the level of technology available to libraries in the State has been dramatically effected.

Study data noted the responsiveness and courtesy of Library of Michigan staff in answering questions, providing information and providing helpfulness to library staff. Overall,respondents indicate a relatively high level of satisfaction with the Library of Michigan's administrative management of the LSTA program.

Evaluator Grade: Participant satisfaction with LSTA Administration- B+

Statewide Programs (AccessMichigan/MEL/ATLAS)

AccessMichigan is a "virtual" library comprised of a selection of commercial electronic databases made available for statewide access along with hundreds of articles from magazines and newspapers in electronic format. MEL is an acronym standing for Michigan Electronic Library, a subject-based "launch pad" to Internet resources.

Respondents are extremely enthusiastic regarding the use of LSTA funds for AccessMichigan and MEL (considering those the primary "statewide programs".)scoring the use of these funds at an average of 6.54 out of 7.0. (a 0-7 scale rating "good use of funds" Q.9). Further, respondents would rather retain AccessMichigan even if other grant programs were lost. Library staff are, as a group, highly resistant to the idea of losing AccessMichigan.

There are,however, minority concerns regarding the utilization of AccessMichigan. Several respondents feel AccessMichigan is utilized too little by customers and too much by staff. 10% of respondents indicated AccessMichigan is used 100% by staff. The plurality view is AccessMichigan is used more by staff than by customers. An attendant criticism is that the Library of Michigan has not provided the marketing or other resources to effectively market or "mainstream" AccessMichigan to the public. This lack of marketing support has contributed to the belief in an underutilized AccessMichigan.

It needs to be pointed out this is a distinctly minority view, although many respondents did not challenge this issue when confronted with it in group.

Evaluator Grade:
Development of AccessMichigan as a Statewide program- A
Administration of AccessMichigan-A
Preparation for AccessMichigan to be mainstreamed - C-
Marketing of AccessMichigan to end-users - D

Non-Competitive Grants

Data collected suggests Blind and Physically Handicapped grants are no longer needed and respondents feel these special populations are being served. There appeared to be no groundswell of opposition to the elimination of these grants. There was, however, minority opposition to the ending of grants to the ROCs (Regions of Cooperation). These regions of resource sharing between multi-type libraries have been effective particularly in the more rural and less populated areas. For some, the ROCs have provided significant assistance in grant preparation, interpretation of Library of Michigan or State of Michigan rules or findings, computer assistance and in other aspects of library management and development.

While the elimination of most non-competitive grants appears to be supported, there remains localized support for the ability to provide funding in support of ROCs where they may be of particular or unique value.

Evaluator Grade: Management of Non-Competitive Grants- B

Competitive Grants
Concept of the Competitive Grant Program

The LSTA competitive grants offered by the Library of Michigan account for the biggest impact of the LSTA program on many libraries. Libraries with an interest in developing a project are invited to submit an application to receive funding in support of the project.

Competitive grants present an approach/avoidance conflict for many of the library staff throughout the State. Library staff are attracted by the ability to acquire grant funding for much needed projects. However, they are repelled by the time-consuming, detail-heavy, burdensome task of completing the application in an environment of libraries in competition.

Library staff remain positive regarding the competitive grant process. It was perceived, however,many believe there are few other options and "make the best of it". And in further probing, it was learned few had considered the potential for alternative solutions.

Evaluator Grade:
Administration of Competitive Grants- B,
Use of Competitive Grants as a Solution- C

Competitive Grant Success Rates

Approximately ½ of all libraries participating are successful about ½ or less of the time. Findings also suggest the number of successful grantees comes from a smaller group of libraries each year. Current success rate of the grantee does have an impact on the grantees' view of the Library of Michigan and the LSTA program. Those who are unsuccessful as grant applicants rate the LSTA program significantly less favorably. School libraries report the lowest success rate (½ have a 0-25% success rate) and public along with special libraries have the highest success rate.

Evaluator Grade: Management of Grant Approval Process- C

Competitive Grant Process

The single biggest complaint regarding all of the LSTA program is the completion of grant applications is too complicated/difficult/time consuming and bureaucratic.

Additionally, the most often cited "one change" respondents would make to the entire LSTA program would be to create an "easier, less burdensome, application process".

Most respondents believe the process has not gotten easier over the past 5 years.

Evaluator Grade: Competitive Grant Application Form/Data Required- D

Grant Application Procedural Issues

The Library of Michigan administrative procedures for the LSTA program appear to be largely successful:

<   Libraries are capable of describing how they meet the eligibility requirements
<   The quality of the applications has continuously gone up between 1998 and 2001.
<   Respondents rate highly Library of Michigan staff who consult with the applicants
<   Respondents support fair "geographical distribution" of the grant dollars.

Issues/challenges include:

<   Confusion re: what qualifies within funding area boundaries/what does not.
<   The technology plans provided by applicant libraries have been very weak
<   Applicant libraries appear to treat all LSTA requirements as relatively equal. For example, an applicant places as much weight on a lesser issue (i.e. library background) as on the more substantive questions such as "financials" and a "demonstration of need".
<   There appears to be some level of inconsistency in the application review and approval process. By this it is meant there is always a rationale provided for acceptance or rejection of a proposal. However, the rationales vary without an apparent objective standard for what constitutes acceptance or rejection.
<   A small minority of respondents don't know why their application was rejected.
<   12% of unsuccessful applicants blame grant loss on "administrative" criteria or "dotting "i"s and crossing "t"s as on the content of the ideas, demonstrated need, etc.

Data analysis suggests clear distinction between successful/unsuccessful applicants.

Factors of Successful Applications

<   Clear demonstration of "need"
<   Well-organized
<   Clear subheads labeling all necessary elements of application
<   Strong appendix with relevant and well-organized supporting documentation
<   Completion of all necessary elements of application
<   Solid financial review, plan for spending, addressing sustainability
<   Proper fit of proposed project into appropriate funding area
<   Established history of resource sharing and cooperation with other libraries and/or community agencies
<   Clearly-defined relationship between proposed project and library's technology plan

< Grants applied for in the funding categories of Children in Poverty, Internet Training Center Enhancement and Persons having Difficulty Using a Library are awarded at a higher rate than those applying for other categories of award
< Ability of library to recognize weak areas in previous applications in order to improve future applications (including libraries with successful histories)

While few applications demonstrated high scores in every category, most successful applications revealed high scores in most of these categories. Within these categories, some appear more critical than others (noted in red).

This does not mean, however, there are no exceptions. One library provided a very poor demonstration of need and was funded anyway.(See Document Review-Warren Public Library-1999). Other examples of libraries failing key criteria (but are funded) appear in the document review analysis.

Factors of Unsuccessful Applications
< Inadequate demonstration of need
< Disorganized
< Weak (or lack of) appendix with inadequate supporting documentation
< Failure to complete all necessary elements of application
< Inadequate or unclear financials
< Inappropriate fit of proposed project into funding area
< Poorly-established history of resource sharing and cooperation with other libraries and/or community agencies
< Failure to clearly define relationship between proposed project and library's plan for technology
< Applying for basic, general or advanced technology grants
< Inability to recognize weak areas in previous applications, leading to repeat mistakes

Consistent themes in the failed applications have to do with poor organization, lack of demonstration of need, poor financial plan (or, more importantly, no plan for project sustainability after the grant has been expended). An easy to correct error is the failure of libraries to learn from their prior year mistakes. Yet a characteristic of the failed application is the repetition of mistakes from prior year applications.
Evaluator Grade:
Procedural Administration and Diagnostic Responsiveness- C+

Non-Applicants
The lack of awareness among some libraries and the inability to obtain the quota of "aware" public libraries sensitized the evaluation team to the problem of non-applicants.
Throughout the three different studies, attention was devoted to identifying factors which may influence library interest and ability to compete for a LSTA grant.

Factors Impacting Non-Applications
<   Lack of Awareness of LSTA, grant program, how to apply, etc.
<   Failure to attend an LSTA Grant workshop
<   Difficulty/time needed and "hurdle threshold" of the Grant Application Form
<   Frustration at non-selection and poor understanding of what was lacking
<   Perceived arbitrariness of judges in awarding grants
<   Lack of detailed, personal feedback to applicant outlining specific deficiencies
<   Confusion over funding categories,vagueness over rules, confusion over process
<   Lack of technical or other support available for grant application.
<   Unclear "vision" of what a successful grant application looks like
<   Inability/discomfort with attempts at collaboration/funding matches etc.

Evaluator Grade: Library of Michigan Responsiveness to Non-Applicant issues- C-

Grant Application Component Modifications
The Library of Michigan has modified the grant application and respondents have noted and largely approved most of those changes:
<   "Broadly defined criteria" or open-ended project boundaries- supported by 70%-some concerned this prevented knowing what "the Library of Michigan wanted"
<   Funding cap was removed allowing requests for funding of any size project. Supported by plurality, but a minority objected due to perception of fewer grants awarded and their project would have less likelihood of being approved.
<   A requirement for collaboration- supported by a slim majority, with largest libraries most supportive and small libraries least supportive. Collaboration was seen to add complexity and potential embarrassment to the library if denied
<   25% funding match received a split vote. Supporters liked partners contributing in a meaningful way but others cited the difficulties created in bookkeeping, getting partners to commit dollars, delay in funding from the Library of Michigan, etc.
<   "Peer review" panel was seen as a benefit to a majority.Liked "real world" involvement of peers and enhancements to the applications brought by the panel.

Miscellaneous Grant Program Issues
<   Financing of grants. Respondents concerned regarding reimbursement for the grant which may not occur until after the program is implemented.
<   Inclusion of multi-type libraries in the grant funding process. Some concerns are raised over how libraries are compared in the evaluation of the grant application and whether there will now be fewer available grants for public libraries.

Evaluator Grade: Library of Michigan Effort to Continually Improve Elements of the Grant Process- B

LSTA Workshops
½ of respondents have attended an LSTA workshop, 1/4 have attended two or more workshops. 25% of respondents have never attended any workshop. Data suggests the LSTA workshops are a key reason behind increased quality of grant applications.
More respondents from large libraries have not attended a workshop than from small libraries.

The perception may be the LSTA workshop is an elementary workshop not containing advanced information needed by those experienced with grant applications.
Highest rate of success regarding an LSTA grant application is linked to attendance at one workshop. Not attending any workshop reduces the chance for grant success.

Respondents give LSTA workshops a relatively high score for effectiveness. 3/4 of respondents indicate the workshop provided information on what was expected and how to submit a grant with the highest likelihood of success.
Evaluator Grade: Establishing/Managing LSTA Grant Workshops-B+

Summary of Evaluator Scores:
Statewide Access= A-
Equity of Access= B
Develop Information Skills= C-
Stimulate Innovation and Technical Improvements= B
Overall= B+

Participant satisfaction with LSTA Administration- B+
Library of Michigan Effort to Continually Improve Grant Components- B

Development of AccessMichigan as a Statewide program- A
Administration of AccessMichigan-A
Preparation for AccessMichigan to be mainstreamed - C-
Marketing of AccessMichigan to end-users - D
Overall= B+

Management of Non-Competitive Grants- B

Administration of Competitive Grants- B
Use of Competitive Grants as a Solution- C
Management of Grant Approval Process- C
Competitive Grant Application Form/Data Required- D
Library of Michigan Responsiveness to Non-Applicant issues- C-
Procedural Administration and Diagnostics- C+
Overall=C

Establishing/Managing LSTA Grant Workshops-B+

Overall Evaluator Grade: B

Recommendations

1. **Recommend the inclusion of communications and awareness building devices to insure broad awareness of the LSTA program/ goals.**
2. **The Library of Michigan is encouraged to be responsive to the changing landscape of needs. As funds which may be allocated to other purposes are available, consider funding other non-technology areas.**
3. **Being capable of achieving a four part goal with limited resources across a large number of libraries within the State is a daunting goal. Library of Michigan is successfully focusing on selected goals. Continued focus on a limited high priority goal(s) is recommended to provide a more demonstrable return on investment, prove more manageable and generate higher customer satisfaction.**
4. **The Library of Michigan in identifying and supporting the AccessMichigan program has established credibility and built support throughout the library community. Important next steps include the marketing of AccessMichigan.**
5. **The Library of Michigan, in developing the competitive grant process to encourage the support of needed library projects via an objective and open effort and supported by an impartial distribution of funds has established credibility and a reputation for good administration.**
6. **The LSTA grant application process should be streamlined, simplified, with the potential for submitting electronically. Required detail should be reduced and minimal points deducted for administrative errors (points deducted for filling in the blanks, spelling, providing all information, etc.).**
7. **Too many libraries fail the application or are non-applicants. The bias on selection is toward previous "winners". Special provisions, consulting help or adjustments to the rules may be needed to assist libraries that have failed to succeed or are non-applicants.**
8. **Modifications to the LSTA workshop format may encourage more frequent attendance and may encourage those not currently attending to enroll. Changes may include open-entry/exit, modular classes, identifying sessions for the "experienced" applicant, and topics to include:**
   a. **Address "repeat" mistakes which cost applicants funding approval**
   b. **Teach major "non-starter" issues like financials or need.**
   c. **As criteria shift (i.e. funding cap removal)workshops may be used to show participants how to be successful with the new criteria.**
   d. **Funding area boundaries appear to be an ongoing source of confusion.**
   e. **Provide "advanced" level workshops for experienced applicants.**
9. **Continued adjustments of grant criteria may be in order to more effectively achieve strategic goals**
10. **Emphasis on "special populations " is an important goal but protection against potential abuse should be implemented.**
11. **Continue and expand the peer review panel.**
12. **The Library of Michigan should clarify its position on geographical balance of grant funding.**

Summary

The Library of Michigan, overall, is doing an effective, successful job in its administration of the LSTA program. Respondents acknowledge a significant improvement in their place on the technology curve as a result of LSTA funds. Respondents to the survey are generally pleased with many aspects of the program, including AccessMichigan and the competitive grant program. The Library of Michigan staff get high marks for being helpful and responsive to applicants and library staff calling with questions regarding LSTA initiatives. The Library of Michigan works to provide a fair and equitable distribution of funds and is helping libraries fund projects which would never have been funded any other way. The Library of Michigan is seen as credible and knowledgeable regarding its business. AccessMichigan is seen as a "hit" and respondents want it to keep growing. LSTA workshops are positively viewed and have been well attended in the past.

On the other side, the Library of Michigan is not equally effective with all LSTA goals. The Library of Michigan has focused on one to two goals with good effect. That strategy is recommended for continuation. The Library of Michigan needs to improve awareness of the LSTA program to the minority (but still significant number of libraries) who are unfamiliar with this program. While the Library of Michigan must respect funding mandates, it needs to be sensitive to the growing number of libraries who are on the technology curve and need discretionary grant funding to attack other problems. Administratively, the Library of Michigan needs to fix its grant application form and to a lesser extent the process. The form should be electronic and much less labor intensive. AccessMichigan is a very popular "best kept secret". Funds should be allocated to marketing AccessMichigan.

Some libraries are not successful regarding LSTA grants and have a low probability of success. The Library of Michigan may need to provide support to move these "low success" rate libraries into high success rate organizations. The Library of Michigan is emphasizing special populations but should be careful not to waive standards nor allow manipulation of the system by libraries "chasing the money". With the identification of factors believed to influence participation, the Library of Michigan has the opportunity to begin addressing non-participants and those who have failed to successfully apply for a LSTA grant.